

## Chapter 4 – Corridor Planning Principles

### INTRODUCTION

The Corridor Planning Principles presented in this chapter are statements of intent that describe in words how the physical environment in the Rockville Pike corridor should be treated in the future. A set of draft principles for the *Rockville's Pike* plan came directly out of the extensive public input that was generated at the Kick-Off meeting in December 2007 and the Stakeholder Workshop in February 2008. These principles were used to guide the work of the consultant team during the Community Design Charrette (May 31-June 3, 2008), and contributed directly to the development of the *Draft for Planning Commission Public Hearing* which was released on December 29, 2010.

The draft Principles were amended during work sessions with the Planning Commission and organized under three headings:

- A. Livable, desirable environment enhanced by thoughtful urban design
- B. Multimodal transportation, and
- C. Economic viability.

This chapter lists each principle, along with a short description to help understand the intent.

## **CORRIDOR PLANNING PRINCIPLES**

### **A. Liveable, desirable environment enhanced by thoughtful urban design**

#### **1. Community Design and Development Appropriate to Rockville**

The Pike will have a more coherent and human-scale relationship among the buildings, transportation infrastructure, and open spaces, in a manner that creates an attractive and inviting community. This approach places a greater emphasis on building form rather than use, brings buildings closer to the street, encourages façade improvements, reduces the prominence of surface parking, and emphasizes green areas and public gathering spaces, among other strategies. The Plan recommends defining the character of the public realm through development regulations and design guidance that will create more consistent development patterns and greatly improve the appearance of the Pike, while allowing for architectural diversity and visual interest.

#### **2. Mixed uses**

Mixed-use development will contribute to the desirability and vitality of the Pike by placing residences, employment and services in proximity to each other, enabling less reliance on motor vehicles, and a greater sense of community. Areas that are closest to the Twinbrook Metro station are most appropriate for intensive mixed-use development.

#### **3. Inviting conditions for walking and biking**

Providing an environment that is safe, pleasant and convenient for pedestrians and cyclists will make it more likely that the travel mode share in the corridor will shift away from automobiles in the future. The Plan recommends a series of changes to meet this principle, including a finer street grid, smaller blocks, wider sidewalks in more protected locations, and travel lanes or paths for bicycles. Street trees, landscaping, and visually appealing building facades will also enhance the environment for pedestrians and cyclists.

#### **4. Appealing parks and public open spaces for community gathering and activity**

Today's Pike, with its extensive surface parking lots and high speed traffic, may not seem conducive for public gathering spaces and outdoor activity. However, such community amenities are envisioned as important components of the corridor in the future. Public input supported the creation of a pleasant public realm that will invite outdoor activity and community interaction, including open space such as plazas and squares, public spaces that integrate flowers, fountains, and public art; civic areas that support community activities such as farmers markets; and City-owned parks that can provide active and passive functions.

#### **5. Environmentally friendly and sustainable**

The planning process revealed a strong community desire for a greener corridor. This principle will be met by providing more parks and open space, planting more trees,

improving landscaping, reducing impervious surfaces, and supporting green building, among other initiatives. The plan encourages building designs that can be adapted to changing uses over time and, where appropriate, the reuse and adaptation of existing buildings. More broadly, a development approach that mixes uses, especially near transit, encourages a shift away from reliance on the automobile and will have a beneficial impact on air quality, compared to development not in a mixed-use context.

**6. Create a distinctive character for Rockville’s portion of the Corridor**

Rockville will maintain its own distinctive approach to development standards, infrastructure, and the relationship between the two; while continuing to coordinate with other jurisdictions to ensure functionality and compatibility. Portions of the Plan area will be distinguished from the more suburban development patterns of Rockville as well, by having regulatory standards that are customized to those urbanizing areas. In addition, attractive and adequate signage, and lighting and landscaping elements will improve the appearance of the Pike, establish a distinctive character for the corridor, promote and support an appreciation of the Pike’s central role in forming Rockville’s character and history, as well as maintain and enhance its economic success.

**7. Development that is supported by commensurate growth of infrastructure**

The development of the Pike must be in balance with commensurate growth in such key infrastructure and service areas as school capacity, fire and police protection, traffic management and utilities. The City looks forward to continuing our strong partnership with Montgomery County, other government entities, and the residents and businesses of Rockville to address these important quality-of-life topics.

## **B. Multimodal Transportation**

**1. Smooth, safe vehicular flow**

Traffic congestion and the need for improved traffic safety are significant concerns for people who travel along the Pike. Participants in the planning process provided numerous suggestions for addressing traffic concerns including street pavement repairs, improved signal timing, redesign of intersections, and improving access to and from shopping centers. The boulevard concept, which separates fast-moving traffic from slow-moving traffic and reducing the number of curb cuts off of the main thoroughfare, street network enhancements, and intersection improvements recommended in this plan conform to this principle of smoother safer vehicular flow.

**2. Safe and accessible pedestrian and biking infrastructure**

Participant recommendations included sidewalk enhancements, bicycle lanes or paths, signal timings that allow pedestrians to cross the Pike comfortably, improved accessibility to shops and surrounding neighborhoods, and the reconfiguration of buildings and parking lots to enhance the pedestrian environment, among others. Whereas the Pike today prioritizes the private automobile over all other modes of

transportation, the Pike corridor envisioned in this plan safely supports multiple modes of transportation – including walking, biking, and public transit.

**3. Access and movement choices for all travel modes that provide connections within the corridor and with surrounding areas**

Many participants cited the need to better connect Rockville Pike in terms of adjacent shopping centers and surrounding neighborhoods and streets. The current configuration of the street network features incomplete service roads and multiple driveway entrances, which tend to force much of the local traffic onto Rockville Pike – even for very short trips between nearby shopping centers. This plan seeks to formalize the Pike’s service roads and expand the street network to enhance connectivity throughout the corridor for both cars and pedestrians. It also recommends improving pedestrian and bicycle connections between the Pike and its surrounding neighborhoods, which will reduce the need to use a car for every local errand.

**4. Efficient and reliable local and regional public transportation options**

The mixed-use and multi-modal approach supported in this plan relies on availability of efficient, safe and reliable transit. The Corridor’s proximity to Metrorail’s Red Line and the location of the Twinbrook Metro station is an enormous asset to the plan area. In addition, the potential for a county-wide Bus Rapid Transit system, which is an ongoing discussion at the time of this document, would have significant implications for this plan area, as Rockville Pike is one of the routes contemplated.

Despite these opportunities, however, issues remain, including the incomplete utilization of the Metrorail’s Red Line north of the Grosvenor Station and the perceived unreliability of local bus transportation. Safety concerns were also cited related to the mid-block location of bus stops, which tends to encourage pedestrians to cross the Pike mid-block where there are no signals to assist them. Many individuals who do not currently ride the bus expressed an interest in using more efficient public transportation options that would enable them to refrain from driving along the Pike.

**5. Easily navigable environment**

Participants indicated they would like to see wayfinding improvements that will maintain and enhance the economic success of the Pike. They want to see better signage and lighting that will make the Pike more welcoming and navigable for residents and visitors alike. The plan incorporates these recommendations and also provides for a boulevard and expanded road network that will break up some of the largest blocks and create a more coherent system for maneuvering along the Pike. Structured parking and an attractive pedestrian environment will also enable shoppers to “park once” and comfortably reach nearby shops on foot. Elements such as maps, consolidated signage, and informational boards can be integrated into new developments to further facilitate wayfinding along the Pike.

## **C. Economic viability**

### **1. Retention and attraction of local and national retail**

Retail is central to the economic success of the Pike, and participants identified the commercial and retail success as an element that should continue to be supported. The plan supports locally owned stores and large national chains, both of which draw shoppers from throughout the region and contribute to the commercial character of the Pike. As shopping centers age and redevelopment opportunities arise, participants expressed that they would like to see the shops that they patronize remain.

### **2. Market-based, self-sustaining development**

A mix of uses that is based on sound market analysis and economic trends is favored so that developments and the businesses that are in them have ample opportunity to thrive.

### **3. Financeable infrastructure and fiscally responsible implementation**

The public consistently communicated that the plan must be realistic and achievable.

Infrastructure and other required investments must be realistically financeable.

Significant funding by all governmental entities will be necessary to achieve plan goals.